

Interview with Celia Green, Author of the 1968 Classic, *Lucid Dreams*

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Gackenbach: When did you become interested in lucid dreaming and how were other people instrumental in the cultivation of your interest?

Green: I first became aware of lucid dreams when I was writing my Oxford post-graduate thesis on unusual states of consciousness with Professor H.H. Price as my supervisor. I was aware of them from the start as something that was closely related to OBE. They were just one among a very wide range of special states which I included in my thesis. I knew one or two people who had had quite a number, but they were not talked about much in those days.

I found when I talked to academics and experts on sleep and dreaming that there seemed to arise in them some profound resistance. It was very difficult to get any-one to talk coherently about them, even if they did not flatly deny the possibility and assert that if people knew they were dreaming and could think fairly rationally, they really must have been awake. With the more ostensibly tolerant people who open-mindedly accepted my description of what a lucid dream was, I then found that within a few sentences they seemed to have forgotten the definition and muddled lucidity up with something different. They started to talk as if what was being discussed was precognitive dreams or narrative dreams or something else. This started to give me a kind of idea that lucid dreams must cut across some quite important implicit assumptions of their world-view, although they did not cut across anything in mine and seemed only a mildly interesting variant of possible experience.

When I was quite young, in my teens, I had formulated the idea that the greatest advances in science arise where there has been resistance to progress. This is not so much due to the intrinsic intellectual difficulty, but rather the fact that it might threaten the current ideology, whatever it might be. Most of the research which is done is determined by the requirement that it shall, in a fairly obvious and predictable way, reinforce the approved or fashionable theories. This does not mean that the research that is done is exactly wrong, only that a great deal of research that might be done is discriminated against, and the reasons for this are not explicitly stated. Lucid dreams provide a good example. People did not go around saying "I dislike the idea of lucid dreams because. . . ." It was simply very difficult to talk to about lucidity.

Gackenbach: Why did you write your book *Lucid Dreams*? How did it come about and what do you think of the response to it?

Green: The first book on lucid dreams was written as a companion volume to our book on out-of-body experiences (OBEs). When we founded the Institute we were dependent on obtaining financial support, and we thought the best way of finding it was to start doing what work we could, albeit on a very small and restricted scale. After a few years we were lucky to obtain the support of our first really wealthy benefactor (and still unfortunately our only substantial one), who was Cecil Harmsworth King, the late newspaper magnate. In many ways he was an ideal supporter. He did not try to dictate at all what we should do with his money, and that was really very lucky, particularly as so many of the areas we were opening up were so uncharted. It would have been difficult to convince anyone else that a particular thing was worth doing. In many ways our work was quite speculative, even to us! For example, when we made our public appeal for OBE cases we had no idea whether we would receive any useful responses. Now it is pretty well established that such appeals receive a substantial and fairly consistent response.

Part of Cecil King's approach, which made him so congenial a sponsor, was that he regarded his giving us a certain level of financial support for seven years as "priming the pump." He saw that there was scope for a much larger scale of re-search than we could do even with his money. King thought he was providing us with the opportunity to demonstrate that there were previously neglected areas where research could be done and also that we at the Institute had the ability to do it. He hoped that this initial work which he was financing would lead to an increasing flow of financial support to the Institute. So we used the money for what we regard-ed as sighting shots or pilot investigations in as many different fields as possible, and these included lucid dreams as well as OBEs and apparitions.

As it turned out, his hope about priming the pump was scarcely fulfilled so far as the financial response was concerned. Since the end of the seven year covenant we have not had financial support to speak of. Thus it has been an effort to keep the Institute in existence and to maintain some level of contact with the fields of re-search which we have opened up.

I couldn't say that I foresaw that *Lucid Dreams* would be the best received of our books. Now that it has happened, I suppose one can see that it is particularly easy for research on lucid dreams to be expanded because lucid dreams have the rather unique attribute that they are fairly easy for people to develop. It is easy to train subjects for laboratory work and also for people who are interested in developing their lucid dreams. No other metachoric experience is so readily trainable. It is difficult to study

apparitions or waking dreams except from the reports of those who have had spontaneous experiences of them. In studying OBEs in the laboratory you are to a large extent limited to subjects who happen to have a particular aptitude for them, and who may be a special class.

Gackenbach: What do you consider the relationship between lucid dreams and OBEs? Are they the same? How so or how not?

Green: All metachoric experiences have obvious similarities in that they provide a person with a substitute environment which entirely replaces the physical world as normally perceived. In all cases it can be strikingly realistic as an imitation of normal perception, and in all metachoric experiences, except lucid dreams, it can be entered with no perceptible discontinuity in the subject's perceptual experience. Lucid dreams and OBEs seem to be more closely related than other metachoric experiences because a very positive emotionality is reported in connection with both types, with feelings of liberation and an exploratory curiosity. This is not found to the same extent with apparitions or waking dreams.

Other reasons for supposing them to be related are that some habitual subjects have had techniques for transferring themselves from a lucid dreaming state to an OBE one, or at least believed they had. Also, intermediate experiences are reported which are not easily classified as one thing or the other.

On the other hand, there are certain statistical differences. The majority of lucid dreams start from normal sleep, and the majority of OBEs from a normal waking state or, at least as they are reported, from a state of physical unconsciousness caused by anaesthesia or accident. In a way it is not too helpful to set oneself the question whether they are the same or different. You could certainly set up a definition which would include everything one would like to regard as a lucid dream and exclude what one thinks of as OBEs, and vice versa. For myself, I tend to think of these things as a continuum with clusters of characteristics which correspond to various typical forms. The most typical lucid dream is certainly different in some respect from the most typical OBE. The OBE usually commences in a way that is apparently continuous with the subject's environment, but is more likely to develop in a way that includes spectacular "traveling," e.g. intercontinental, or back into the past. On the other hand the most typical lucid dream provides a convincing imitation of physical reality but not of any location particularly well known to the dreamer, and is less likely to include "traveling" which is regarded as long distance, although flying is fairly common. There are, of course, a number of other similarities and differences, which we can only continue to study.

Gackenbach: What is the cause or source of metachoric experiences?

Green: I think the answer to this probably depends on the relationship of meta-choric experiences to normal perception, and part of the answer may be that they don't require much to be triggered.

Students of perception have for a long time accepted the idea of an ordinary hallucination, by which they meant some extraneous image superimposed on what was being perceived in the normal way, but hallucinations of even this kind were regrettably seldom studied. There was, and still is, a prevalent attitude that we only want to know about normality, and if a thing is associated with mental illness, that is good enough to write it off. However, one can take the view that studying extreme and unusual cases could very well give us insights into the mechanisms of normal perception.

You have to realize that the concept of metachoric experiences, and the recognition that a person can enter a substitute environment without realizing that a discontinuity has taken place, is really quite recent. There now seem to be several different characteristic types, and they seem to be a fairly constant part of normal human experience. I think of them as forming a continuum, because you can find intermediate forms which are not easy to classify. We should also be aware that there may be sub-classes which might have different clusters of characteristics. As one studies these phenomena one is constantly having reported to one quite small and dull experiences which people have had, which might not be memorable enough for them to send in response to an appeal, nor perhaps even remembered if they are answering a yes/no questionnaire. So I think the first part of an explanation of meta-choric experiences may be that the metachoric mode is really quite close to that of normal perception. It does not take that much for a person to flip into it for a short time, although it seems very likely that there are individual differences which facilitate it. A fair proportion of OBEs (that is, the dramatic type of OBEs which people tend to report in response to appeals) are associated with obviously traumatic and life-threatening situations. We must mention that a considerable proportion of these, as reported, seem to occur while the subject is actually unconscious as a result of the accident or anaesthetic. Furthermore, we should make a distinction, or at least be aware that there may be a distinction, between those that happen in a highly stressed state of waking consciousness and those that happen when the physical body is completely knocked out for normal purposes, although both of these situations may be viewed as stressful. Thus it appears that high arousal can be a trigger to set off the metachoric mode. But fairly clearly, individual differences play a part in determining whether the trigger works in this way because there is no kind of traumatic experience that can be confidently expected to produce an OBE in everyone.

OBEs are probably the most dramatic in appearance of the metachoric experiences, and they happen in a very wide variety of circumstances. There is a definite group which happens in situations which you might expect to be fairly high in arousal, but they would not normally be excessively stressful, though you would expect a person to be adrenalised. Examples are a person giving a lecture, a dentist extracting a tooth, a person taking a driving test or getting married. We have cases of people watching themselves from the outside in all of these circumstances and several similar ones. Then there are the OBEs which happen in circumstances which do not appear to be states of high arousal at all, when a person is just walking along the street or strolling in the country. Of course you may say that even when there is no particular sign of stress in a person's life there may be some present. It would be a fairly difficult exercise to compare the level of unrecognized stress in the lives of apparently unstressed OBE subjects and a control group of people who also believed themselves to be living stress-free lives and had not had OBEs.

It has been suggested that stress also facilitates lucid dreams but I am keeping an open mind on this, because some of our subjects have told me that they have to be really tranquil in their lives to feel free enough to focus their attention on having lucid dreams. But I think that being in an intellectually stimulated state might help, or at least not being excessively bored.

Waking dreams and apparitional experiences show no sign at present of being associated with any form of stress, even adrenalisation. So the interesting question is, how close is what goes on in metachoric experiences to the normal perceptual process?

Gackenbach: Have lucid dreams or any of these types of experiences been important to you in your own life cycle? If so how?

Green: I never had any metachoric-type experiences until I actually started studying lucid dreams. Then I occasionally had lucid dreams. I would not say they were terribly important to me, but they were certainly interesting. At least in my own case I think of lucid dreams as quite different from ordinary ones, both in perceptual clarity and in emotional tone. I have sometimes met people who have OBEs and who have told me mental techniques for trying to induce them, but none of these ever worked for me. I certainly have an impression that individual differences have a much more determining role in influencing who is able to get OBEs, while lucid dreams could probably be induced by deliberate training in most people. Furthermore, lucid dreams arise fairly spontaneously as soon as somebody knows about them. I think this is illustrated in the people who presently work with me at the Institute. None of them,

including myself, have ever had an OBE but about 50% of them have had lucid dreams although they did not before they started to study them. This has arisen without any very deliberate efforts being made, just as a result of people being exposed to the idea and perhaps thinking about lucid dreaming as they fell asleep. Apart from my fairly small population of lucid dreams, I have never had meta-choric experiences and I tend to think of myself as a sort of person who would not be easily induced to have any kind of hallucination.

Gackenbach: I understand that you are currently writing another book on lucid dreaming. Will it be significantly different from your last book? If so, how?

Green: My colleague Charles McCreery and I are writing another book on lucid dreams. It will be a completely new book, as so much work has been done in this field since the first one, and since we have so many new cases. It will cover the same ground as the first one, but of course it will include a survey of the work to date in each of the areas covered. We are planning to follow this with a similar follow-up book on OBEs, which will also update our earlier book in the light of work that has been done since then.

Gackenbach: Do you have other writings and/or research projects planned for the future? If so, what?

Green: Of course I have an effectively unlimited quantity of research and writing projects planned for the future. The extent to which they can be carried out will, unfortunately, continue to be almost entirely determined by the financial resources which are available. As I mentioned we have had virtually no financial support since the Cecil King money ended. The scale of work which we are able to carry out, and indeed have ever been able to, should certainly not be taken to indicate that we don't have plans for working on a larger scale. We will implement them as soon as we are able to obtain the money.

At the time I wrote *Lucid Dreams* no laboratory work on lucid dreams had been done and I hoped that I and my associates would be regarded as suitable people to start it. However, even though other people have started to work on lucid dreams in laboratories, we are still trying to raise money to set one up, which, by the way, would not really require an inordinately prohibitive scale of finance. Once we had it we would use it not only for lucid dreams but for work on other metachoric experiences and possibly other things as well, depending on the volume of work the laboratory could handle and the money available to us for running it. Even the writing of books in our present circumstances is a slow and difficult procedure. Nonetheless we continue to collect cases and will always be pleased to receive cases from your readers to add to our files—anything which they consider illustrative of particularly

interesting points. We are especially interested in those associated with the relationship between lucid dreams and other metachoric experiences.

From time to time people from all over the world write to us, including several from the USA and Canada, wishing to come and join us in our work. So perhaps I can give this much of a preliminary answer to anyone who may be thinking of doing this. Of course everyone is welcome to come and augment our efforts, but I am afraid we cannot offer a salary at present to anyone, although we might be able to give them some help in living fairly inexpensively. As our problems are so largely financial, we hope that anyone who comes will be prepared to divide their time between helping with business activities designed to generate income to support the Institute's work, the background work of the Institute, and work on the actual re-search projects.

Editor's Note: If interested, you can write to Ms. Green at the Institute of Psychophysical Research, 118 Ganbury Rd., Oxford, England, OX2 6JU.